



North Tyneside Council

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Briefing note

To: Children's SMT; Cllr Phillips CMB;
North Tyneside Safeguarding
Children Partnership Executive
Group

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Title of Briefing: Quality Assurance of External Children's Homes

1. Purpose

The Safeguarding Executive Group received a report on 22 December summarising the actions undertaken by the Authority regarding the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's National Review – Children with Disabilities and Complex Health Needs Placed in Residential Settings. This included an overview of the quality assurance arrangements for children's residential settings and a specific focus on the quality monitoring of Underley Garden School in Lancashire where 2 North Tyneside children are in residence.

It was agreed that a further report be provided summarising the quality monitoring of all external children's homes where North Tyneside children have been placed during 2022-23.

2. Regional Quality Assurance Arrangements

The paper presented to the Safeguarding Executive in December provided a summary of the children's regional collaborative commissioning and quality assurance arrangements across the 12 local authorities in the north east.

The arrangements for regional quality monitoring are currently under review by North East Association of Directors of Children's Services (NE ADCS). This is to consider what approach works best for each local authority and the national proposals around

collaborative commissioning. Specifically, this is in relation to the government response to the independent review of children's social care [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#) which is currently out to consultation until 11 May. This proposes new Regional Care Co-operatives (RCCs) which would require significant structural change to deliver a range of functions, including commissioning of children's social care, on a multi-LA footprint. The implications for regional collaboration and quality assurance will need to be considered as part of DfE pathfinder work on RCCs over the next 2 years.

3. Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG)

North Tyneside, along with other North East LAs, is a member of a national children's collaborative called [Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group \(CCRAG\)](#). North Tyneside has worked with CCRAG since January 2020 and more recently has subscribed to the group's shared quality monitoring approach. CCRAG is hosted by Hertfordshire County Council:

'The Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG) is a partnership of local authorities working together to support the sourcing, contracting, monitoring and annual fee negotiations for children's placements and to improve the outcomes for all children and young people.'

Key priorities:

- *To improve overall quality standards and outcomes for young people in care*
- *To support local authorities and providers of children's services to work in partnership, reduce duplication, improve efficiencies, and share information securely in one place*
- *Allocation and sharing of quality assurance and fee negotiations between member Local Authorities*
- *Working with the market to provide quality up to date information on individual service providers/provisions and improve sufficiency*
- *Focus on relational commissioning and encouraging effective communication across the partnership*

The group does this by coordinating procedures that monitor the quality and cost of placements. Information is shared via the CCRAG database.'

Current North East membership includes:

- Darlington Borough Council

- Durham County Council
- North Tyneside Borough Council
- South Tyneside Borough Council
- Stockton on Tees Borough Council

North East LAs are represented on the national CCRAAG Steering Group and have been influential in agreeing the quality monitoring toolkit that has been developed and is used nationally by all participating Authorities.

Further information on the CCRAAG protocols for allocating settings and quality monitoring can be found at Appendix 1.

4. Quality monitoring of children's homes for North Tyneside children

In North Tyneside, the quality monitoring role is shared between the Commissioning Officers who undertake the quality monitoring and Commissioning Managers who act as the main point of contact for providers, deal with any concerns that need escalating and undertake the intelligence gathering and market development aspects of the role. The Commissioning Team triangulate information from other agencies and work alongside key services and professionals to undertake the monitoring, as detailed below.

The process carried out by the allocated commissioning lead officer consists of:

- Maintaining regular contact with the providers/settings and sharing information with other LAs regarding quality, capacity and any new developments;
- Annual monitoring including desk based review and external monitoring/operational visits;
- Using a quality monitoring tool that has been reviewed and developed nationally with the Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAAG). This means that monitoring information covering national providers can be shared between participating LAs where appropriate;
- The process includes gathering professional feedback from placing LAs, for example from social workers, IROs and SEND Teams which is incorporated into the monitoring and helps to identify any key areas of focus;
- For the children's homes that North Tyneside are responsible for monitoring under the regional/CCRAAG arrangements, a joint monitoring visit is carried out by Commissioning and an in-house residential manager. This may be expanded to a multi-disciplinary visit, coordinated by Commissioning, where there are settings considered to be at risk of a significant deterioration in

quality and the input of other professionals would be of benefit, for example if the package includes education.

- For the children's homes caring for North Tyneside children that are allocated to another LA under the regional/CCRAG arrangements, completion of quality monitoring would be the responsibility of the allocated LA. To supplement this we have the option of arranging operational visits from an in-house residential manager. As above this may be expanded to a joint or multi-disciplinary visit, coordinated by Commissioning, where there are settings considered to be at risk of a significant deterioration in quality, or settings that have been graded by Ofsted as Requires Improvement or Inadequate;
- Review of monthly Regulation 44 reports. The children's home regulations, require that an independent person visits the children's home at least once each month to ensure children are effectively safeguarded; and the conduct of the home promotes children's well-being. The commissioning officer requests and reviews the Reg 44 reports from all homes in which we have a child placed. The reports are also reviewed by an operational lead (LA children's home manager) and with senior managers if there are outstanding issues. Any queries/concerns are addressed with the provider and shared with other LAs as appropriate;
- Ofsted grades are checked on a monthly basis. If settings with North Tyneside children drop below good or outstanding, commissioning will inform children's social care/SEND senior management to discuss whether any action needs to be taken in relation to the child's placement;
- There is a suspension process for framework providers, where settings will be restricted from receiving referrals from the participating LAs if there are concerns around quality. This may include homes which have been graded inadequate by Ofsted, where there is an Ofsted suspension or restriction or where significant concerns have been raised as a result of the monitoring process. For off-framework settings, information would be shared with regional and/or CCRAG LAs as appropriate and LAs advised not to spot purchase placements.

4.1. Other agencies/services/professionals/ involved with quality assurance

4.2. Ofsted

Ofsted are responsible for evaluating the impact of care and support on the experiences and progress of children and young people. For example, the children's home inspection framework comprises:

- One full inspection per year.

- One interim inspection per year (not always required for Good/Outstanding homes).
- Additional monitoring visits in response to an incident, complaint or concern.
- Review of monthly Reg 44 reports (completed by an independent Reg 44 visitor).
- Review of six monthly Reg 45 reports (home manager's quality assurance report).
- Review of any notifications of serious events.

4.3. Responsibilities of Social Workers in relation to quality assurance

Whilst the above processes are in place to monitor the provider/setting as a whole, the responsibility for ensuring that individual outcomes for children are set and monitored sits within the care planning process with social workers and IROs, who will alert commissioning if there are any concerns in relation to quality.

All social work visits to children in care involve an aspect of quality assurance. There are robust performance management arrangements in place to monitor statutory social work visits in line with the child's care plan. Social workers are required by the care planning regulations to speak with children alone and to see their bedrooms. This supports their ability to be assured that the setting is providing adequate care to the child. Any aspects of the child's placement plan (which sets out how the home will deliver the relevant aspects of the care plan) that are not being met, or which are a cause for concern are raised with the home by the social worker in the first instance.

There is then an escalation process via the social work team manager, and senior manager into commissioning to explore the presenting issue and seek resolution and/or decide the appropriateness of continuation of the placement. Ultimately if the concern about the care provided was serious and/or could not be resolved this would be escalated to Ofsted as the regulatory body of children's homes.

4.4 Responsibilities of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in relation to quality assurance

IROs have a clear role in monitoring the appropriateness of placement provision linked to the care plan and objectives therein. They have a responsibility to visit all looked after children before their reviews and to monitor their progress in between. Within North Tyneside there is an internal mechanism aligned to the IRO handbook which supports their ability to raise any issues they become aware of. This involves

the use of a quality concern alert to the social work manager and then the process of escalation regarding placement issues remains as above.

7. Conclusion

The vast majority of the external children's homes we use are rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. In addition, the quality monitoring undertaken, both desk-based and through on-site monitoring visits, provides an additional level of assurance that the homes meet the required national standards, provide high quality care and promote children's overall wellbeing. At an individual level, the key professionals involved work hard to ensure that children are happy, safe, well supported and that their voice is heard.

As a corporate parent we have high expectations for the children in our care and high standards for those we commission to look after them. Where there are quality issues identified, the Commissioning Team works closely with Children's Services to act swiftly and proportionately to address them. This is directly with the children's home and, where appropriate, with the wider provider organisation and any regional or national management. This ranges from overseeing the actions in a home's quality improvement plan through to escalating more serious concerns to other LAs and to Ofsted if enforcement action is appropriate. The example of the Gables children's home highlights the inherent risk in working with new providers who are opening new homes, and the implications when a home has their registration suspended.

